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Drawing attention to institutional communication soft tools: the case of lipdubs

Dirigiendo la atención hacia los instrumentos de comunicación institucional blandos: el caso del lipdub

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ABSTRACT: Communication is widely accepted as central to the construction of institutional image and organizational culture. In this sense, new technologies are playing a significant role in the development of new institutional communication (IC) instruments which contribute to the achievement of these IC objectives. Some of these tools are sometimes deemed soft instruments because they are supposed to require little involvement of the institution board. However, institutional image is such a sensitive asset that soft instruments may entail serious consequences for institutions. This paper aims at directing attention to the relevance of these tools by describing their implications. In so doing, we address institutional videos known as lipdubs.

RESUMEN: *La comunicación constituye un elemento central en la construcción de la imagen y la cultura de una institución. En ese sentido, las nuevas tecnologías están desempeñando un papel destacado en el desarrollo de nuevos instrumentos de comunicación institucional que contribuyen a la persecución de estos objetivos. Algunos de estos instrumentos son considerados blandos al entender que no*

requieren la involucración de la directiva de la institución. Sin embargo, la imagen es un activo tan delicado que el uso de instrumentos blandos puede suponer graves consecuencias para esta. El presente artículo pretende dirigir la atención hacia la relevancia de estos instrumentos describiendo sus implicaciones. Para ello, abordaremos los vídeos institucionales denominados lipdubs.

Keywords: institutional communication, institutional image, employees' socialization, lipdub.

Palabras clave: comunicación institucional, imagen institucional, socialización de empleados, lipdub.

1. Introduction

Communication is widely accepted as central to the construction of institutional image and organizational culture. External and internal communication have traditionally been considered two disciplines¹ dealing respectively with them and specific tools are usually designed whether to convey a positive image of an institution or to enhance internal relationships. In this sense, press releases, press conferences, events creation, internal bulletins, staff meetings, and so on are valuable tools directed to the achievement of an institution's goals as for image and staff socialization. However, new technologies are playing a significant role in the development of new institutional communication (IC) instruments which contribute to the achievement of these IC central objectives. As Argenti² claims "technology has fundamentally changed the dynamic between corporations and their employees and outside constituencies, creating a new sense of entitlement by enabling insiders and outsiders to disseminate and collect information about companies at will and new equality in communication".

The employees' new capacity to distribute information about the company reinforces the need to integrate the institution employees in organizational life so as to increase the sense of belonging and avoid negative communication. Through forums such as blogs, employees can share their impressions and publish their grievances³ without any gatekeeping. But technology has provided institutions with highly potential resources as well. Latest tendencies in socializing employees together with the chances provided by new technologies have given rise to communication instruments of great value both for improving institutional image and enhancing internal relationships: intranets, social networks, wall screens at the office, podcasts and videos publication, blogs, etc. Some of these tools are sometimes deemed soft instruments because they are supposed to require little involvement of the institution board. They are even carried out without previous strategic assessment since there exists a general thought that these actions will

¹ Organizational socialization is also addressed by other research disciplines such as internal marketing, organizational behavior, organizational sociology, human resources, etc. Cfr. LA PORTE, José M., "Principios de comunicación interna en el tercer sector", in MORA, J.M., *10 ensayos de comunicación institucional*, EUNSA, 2009, Pamplona.

² ARGENTI, Paul A., "How technology has influenced the field of corporate communication", *Journal of Business and Technical Communication*, vol. 20, n° 2, pp. 360-361.

³ BISHOP, L. and LEVINE, D., "Computer-mediated communication as employees voice: A case study", *Industrial and Labor Relations*, vol. 52, pp. 214.

not embrace significant implications for the institution. This represents the “everybody does it” philosophy. However, this paper aims at catching attention on the relevance of the use of these soft communication tools. We focus on the uploading of institutional videos in the Internet, particularly the so-called *lipdub* since it is oriented towards meeting the aforementioned institutional objectives: improvement of institutional image and staff socialization. Although there is little literature on the *lipdub* it can be defined as⁴:

[...] a sort of video clip recorded by a group of people who lip sync to a song, act and dance while the camera follows them through the facilities of the institution they belong to. It is an informal way to showcase a different perspective of themselves. The *lipdub* shows the facilities, staff and location of the institution and at the same time it conveys different intangible aspects of itself: working atmosphere, culture, indicators of its service quality (showing satisfaction, facilities and activities), and style.

The *lipdub* became a strong communication instrument especially in the university context. It is a short term communication instrument that depends on fashion and fads but which effects can remain in the long term influencing institutional image whether positively or not. It has been little studied and maybe because of this many institutions use *lipdubs* without previous assessment of eventual consequences. Universities found in the *lipdub* a way to reinforce the sense of belonging of students, another core stakeholder distinct from employees. Thus, aiming at communicating an attractive image to improve positioning and attract new students. However, although apparently the *lipdub* constitutes a creative and informal way to communicating an institutional message and fostering employees or students relationships, as an IC instrument, it entails significant implications for institutions.

Under this scenario of lack of literature about a phenomenon involving significant consequences for institutions, our purpose is to investigate the *lipdub* so as to be able to feature it as an IC tool. Specifically, we aim to describe this tool’s main characteristics in order to draw implications for institutions from them. In so doing, first, we develop the theoretical background by presenting the concept of IC, its main components and some of its core principles so as to contextualize this study and facilitate the understanding of how IC instruments affect institutional image. Secondly, we introduce the role of new technologies and the *lipdub* as an IC instrument. Thirdly, we feature the *lipdub* through an exploratory study of qualitative nature by examining a sample of 25 *lipdubs*. Fourthly, we analyze its implications for institutions and, finally, some conclusions are presented.

2. Some previous considerations on institutional communication

Hitherto, there does not exist a widely accepted definition of IC. Extant literature usually refers to it as corporate communication⁵; however, in this article we follow

⁴ DÍAZ-MÉNDEZ, Montserrat, “The *lipdub* as a trendy way of corporate communication: implications for institutions” in MANN, Evelyn P., *Advertising. Types, trends and controversies*, Nova, New York, p. 28.

⁵ Cfr. VAN RIEL, Cees B. M., *Principles of Corporate Communication*, Prentice Hall, New York, 1995; DOLPHIN, Richard R., *The fundamentals of corporate communication*, Butterworth Heinemann, Oxford,

those authors⁶ who understand the expression *institutional communication* is more precise since corporate communication principles can be likewise applicable to a broader range of organizations: private or public and profit and not-profit organizations. According to this stream of research, we understand that IC is a strategic type of communication directed to different stakeholders of an institution which objective is to establishing high quality relationships between them so as to increase social knowledge and reputation of the institution⁷. In this sense, it can be asserted that the ultimate goal of IC is to contribute to the favorable development of institutional image by means of improving different stakeholders' relationships. This represents an agreement point in the literature that enables to examine IC theoretically. Thus, in spite of the fact that the field of IC is featured by a lack of consistency as for what factors and aspects it encompasses⁸, there exists a widely accepted assumption in the discipline that the two main concepts sustaining the basis of institutional communication are identity and image⁹. The analysis of these fundamental components of IC allows the understanding of its essentials. In so doing, we must bear in mind that the literature abounds with different definitions of identity and image in the scope of organizations, especially business firms, usually associating these concepts to the adjective *corporate*. To our purpose, a brief outline of some seminal definitions is here given with the aim to provide an idea of what is generally assumed in the literature with respect to these concepts, without any attempt at completeness.

The original concept of *corporate identity* is ascribed to Margulies in the 1950s¹⁰. He defined it as the “sum of all ways a company chooses to identify itself to all its stakeholders: the community, customers, employees, the press, present and potential stockholders, security analysts, and investment bankers”¹¹. According to Blauw¹² corporate identity is the “total of visual and non-visual means applied by a company to present itself to all its relevant target groups”. On his part, Dowling¹³ describes corporate identity as referring to “the symbols an organisation uses to identify itself to

1999; CORNELISSEN, Joep, *Corporate Communications. Theory and Practice*, Sage, Thousand Oaks, 2004.

⁶ Cfr. SOTELO, Carlos, *Introducción a la comunicación institucional*, Ariel, Barcelona, 2001; NIETO, Alfonso, *Economia della Comunicazione Istituzionale*, FrancoAngeli, Milán, 2006, p. 11; LA PORTE, José M., “La comunicación institucional como fundamento integrador”, in MORA, J.M. (ed.), *10 ensayos de comunicación institucional*, EUNSA, Pamplona, 2009, p. 45.

⁷ LA PORTE, José M., *op. cit.*, p. 45.

⁸ Cfr. BALMER, John M.T. and GREYSER, Stephen A., “Integrating corporate identity, corporate branding, corporate communications, corporate image and corporate reputation”, *European Journal of Marketing*, vol. 40 (7/8), 2006, p. 730; PÉREZ-LATRE, Francisco J., “Once claves que el marketing y la publicidad aportan a la comunicación institucional”, in MORA, J.M., (ed.), *10 ensayos de comunicación institucional*, EUNSA, Pamplona, p. 216; LA PORTE, José M. (a), *op. cit.*, p. 41.

⁹ VAN RIEL, Cees B. M., *op. cit.*, p. 53. Van Riel's contribution by his book *Principles of Corporate Communication* was primary for the consolidation of these two concepts as the foundation of corporate communication. See more in GUTIÉRREZ, Elena, “La comunicación institucional a examen. Breves notas bibliográficas” in MORA, J.M. (ed.), *10 ensayos de comunicación institucional*, EUNSA, Pamplona, 2009, p. 245.

¹⁰ SOTELO, Carlos, *op. cit.*, p.165.

¹¹ MARGULIES, Walter P., “Make the Most of Your Corporate Identity”. *Harvard Business Review*, vol. 55, jul/aug, 1977, p. 66.

¹² BLAUW, E., *Het Corporate Image, Vierde Gehee Herzine*, De Viergang, Amsterdam, 1994, p. 18.

¹³ DOWLING, G. R., *Corporate Reputations: Strategies for Developing the Corporate Brand*. Kogan Page. London, 1994, p. 40.

people”. Finally, Gray and Balmer¹⁴ provide an interesting definition for the purpose of this article by connecting corporate identity to corporate communication: “corporate identity is the reality and uniqueness of an organization, which is integrally related to its external and internal image and reputation through corporate communication”. These and other extant definitions¹⁵ suggest the most relevant commonality among them deals with the idea that corporate identity represents what the institution is¹⁶ and becomes an integral aspect of an organisation's communication function¹⁷.

On the other side, the image of an institution regardless it is a profit or nonprofit one contributes to consolidate their position in their different stakeholders' mind. It represents an added value and a managerial competitive factor¹⁸ that enables institutions to overcome adverse context or market conditions. We can say that it works as a filter that balances stakeholders' perception of institutions' decisions, mistakes and actions towards the image the institution has to date. Dowling¹⁹ refers briefly to it as “the respect and esteem in which it [a company] is held”. For Martínez²⁰ it represents the “result of the perceptions and experiences that people get from the organizations. In some sense, it is the visible part of the corporate culture [...] it is what people think about the organization [...] people identify an organization for what they see and hear about it, for the way its employees and managers behave, for its public behavior and for the direct or indirect relations they have with it”. Costa²¹ understands that corporate image is the “mental representation in the collective people's imaginary of a group of characteristics and values that act as a stereotype and determine the behavior and opinions of those people”. A more recent definition is provided by van Riel and Fombrun²² who explain that corporate image consists of the “interpretations stakeholders make about the company”. There are many more definitions for corporate image in the literature. Most of them agree that corporate image embraces broadly someone's mental representation according to the perception of different signs. It is commonly defined as the perception of the organization's identity by its different

¹⁴ GRAY, E.R. and BALMER, J.M.T., “Managing Corporate Image and Corporate Reputation”, *Long Range Planning*, vol. 31, 5, 1998, p. 696.

¹⁵ See v.g. ABRATT, Russell, “A new approach to the corporate image management process”, *Journal of Marketing Management*, vol. 5, n° 1, 1989, p. 65; OLINS, Wolff, *Corporate Identity: Making Strategy visible through Design*, Thames & Hudson, London, 1989; VAN RIEL, Cees B.M. and Balmer, John M.T., “Corporate identity: the concept, its measure and management”, *European Journal of Marketing*, vol. 31, 1997, p. 342; BERNSTEIN, D. *Company, Image and Reality. A Critique of Corporate Communications*, Cassell, London, 1992; DICHTER, E. “What's in an image?”, *The Journal of ConsumerMarketing*, vol. 2, n° 1, 1985, p. 77.

¹⁶ BALMER, John M.T., “Corporate branding and connoisseurship”, *Journal of General Management*, vol. 21 n° 1, 1995, p. 27.

¹⁷ CHRISTENSEN, Lars T., and ASKEGAARD, S., “Corporate identity and corporate image revisited. A semiotic perspective”. *European Journal of Marketing*, vol. 35, 2001, p. 295.

¹⁸ MÍNGUEZ A., Norberto, “Un marco conceptual para la comunicación corporativa”, *Zer Revista de Estudios de Comunicación*, 8, 2000, p. 310.

¹⁹ DOWLING, Grahame R. *Creating Corporate Reputations*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2001, p. 268.

²⁰ MARTÍNEZ S., José M., *Marketing de servicios profesionales. Para la pequeña y mediana empresa*, Prentice Hall, Madrid, 2002, p. 10.

²¹ COSTA, Joan, *La imagen corporativa en el siglo XXI*, La Crujía Ediciones, Buenos Aires, 2001, p. 58.

²² VAN RIEL, Cees B.M and FOMBRUN Charles J., *Essentials of corporate communication: implementing practices for effective reputation management*, Routledge, London, 2007, p. 68.

stakeholders, considering the organization's identity as the self-portrayal of the institution²³.

Corporate image is most commonly related to the receiver side of the communication process, i.e., the different stakeholders of an organization²⁴. Consumers and users do no longer purchase goods and services; instead they co-create and share an experience with an institution. Through the acquisition of a product (whether tangible or not) they consume the institution's image (or a brand), i.e., a contact point takes place between consumer's values as a person and values associated to an institution. This highlights the strategic value of image for all types of institutions. At present, objective quality standards of products can be easily imitated, market positioning of institutions in their stakeholders' imaginary becomes largely a matter of institutional image management. Image can be altered according to the organization's strategic goals through the managing of certain variables affecting it²⁵. Nevertheless, corporate image may also be negatively affected by external circumstances involuntarily: an accident, a mistake, a formal complaint from a stakeholder with impact in the media, changes in trends and stakeholders' likings, etc. These factors prompt an organization to react soon and properly so as to prevent its image from being seriously damaged. The vulnerability of institutional image together with its strategic value justifies the executive nature of the communication function in an institution²⁶.

3. Some principles of IC

Corporate communication has been extensively considered in the literature a conduit between corporate identity and corporate image²⁷; however, it cannot be asserted that corporate communication professionals can control the image conveyed by the institution to its different stakeholders²⁸. Stakeholders' subjectivity creates their particular perception of messages and so of institutions as a whole, and may give rise to unexpected interpretations²⁹. In this sense, the better education and the greater information access of stakeholders at present do not allow an institution to carry out actions or activities conveying a message not sufficiently assessed in advanced. With this regard, seminal authors in the field have highlighted the importance of avoiding

²³ GUTIÉRREZ G., Elena, "La comunicación institucional a examen. Breves notas bibliográficas", in MORA, J.M. (ed.), *10 ensayos de comunicación institucional*, EUNSA, Pamplona, 2009, p. 245.

²⁴ CHRISTENSEN, Lars T. and ASKEGAARD, S., *op cit.*, p. 292.

²⁵ Next section deals with these variables.

²⁶ The growing concern about institutional image relevance in the scope of management provides full support to the progressive increase of new graduate and master degrees on communication in the world, and especially in Europe in the frame of the Bologna Process. [The Bologna Process began with the Bologna Declaration of June 1999 and aimed to create a European Higher Education Area by 2010, in which students can choose from a wide and transparent range of high quality courses enabling comparisons and compatibility among different degrees in Europe].

²⁷ Cfr. REDDY, Michael J., "The Conduit Metaphor: A Case of Frame Conflict in our Language about Language", in ORTONY, Andrew (ed.), *Metaphor and Thought*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1979; ABRATT, Russell, *op. cit.*, p. 65; OLINS, Wolff, *op. cit.*, p. 21; VAN RIEL, Cees, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

²⁸ CHISTENSEN, Lars T. and CORNELISSEN, Joep, "Bridging Corporate and Organizational Communication: review, development and a look to the future", *Management Communication Quarterly*, vol. 25, nº 3, 2011, p. 391.

²⁹ *Ibíd.*, p. 391.

gaps in institutional communication³⁰. In so doing, transparency and alignment between corporate identity and corporate image stand out as a strategic guideline³¹.

Managing corporate image may sound then as a paradox itself since it is a result of the multiple interactions between different agents and factors; which some of them are impossible to manage such as people's particularities or the media response. However, the multiplicity of factors interconnected to each other affecting corporate image cannot be left to chance. According to different authors' contributions³² the following is a classification of the main factors that aim at determining corporate image through the consolidation of the corporate identity: (a) *behavior*, which refers to the way of behaving and answering of all members of the institution; (b) *visual identity*, that embraces aspects as the name, brand, and symbols that graphically represent the essence of the institution; (c) *products* meaning that the activity of the organization itself will determine its identity to a great extent; (d) *context*, obviously, the geographic origin of the institution as well as the geographic places where it develops its activity will condition its corporate image, as we can see through the importance of the "made in" label; (e) *institutional culture*, since shared values of an institution represent an internal integration element that help to build institutional identity from a social perspective; finally (f) *communication* activities of an institution (processes, messages and means involved in the information transmission of the organization) play a decisive role in the formation of an institutional image in the public's imaginary. These factors inevitably communicate an image. The institution must strive then to convey a consistent message through the combination of them³³. Messages have to be transparent, coherent and never overlap in order to reinforce credibility. A mistake in the message, the channel, the target-audience or the moment chosen may cause serious damage to an institution's image. Thus, it is advisable for an institution having a fluent communication between communication managers and top managers so as to provide consistency to all actions taken by the institution as well as establishing some principles and remain stick to them. In this regard, transparency and loyalty to corporate identity have been suggested as core values linked to the communication of institutions in the literature³⁴. These principles pervade the practice of IC which is presented through an example. Far from the purpose to get into the open debate on the similarities and differences between IC

³⁰ Cfr. FOMBRUN, Charles J. and RINDOVA, Violina P., "The road to transparency: Reputation management at Royal Dutch/Shell", in Schultz, M., Hatch, M. J. and Larsen, M.H. (eds.), *The expressive organization: Linking identity, reputation and the corporate brand*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2000, p. 78; HATCH, M.J. and SCHULTZ, M., "Are the strategic stars aligned for your corporate brand?", *Harvard Business Review*, vol. 79, 2001, p. 130; BALMER, John M.T. and GREYSER, S.A., *Revealing the corporation: Perspectives on identity, image, reputation, corporate branding, and corporate-level marketing*, Routledge, London, UK, 2003, p. 23.

³¹ FOMBRUN, Charles J. and RINDOVA, Violina P., *op. cit.*, p. 70; HATCH, M.J. and SCHULTZ, M., *op. cit.*, p. 130; CHRISTENSEN, Lars T., "Corporate communication: the challenge of transparency", *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, vol. 7, n° 3, 2002, p.162.

³² VAN RIEL, Cees B.M., *op. cit.*, p 30; MÍNGUEZ A., Norberto, *op. cit.*, p 304; MARÍNEZ S., José M., *op. cit.*, p. 10.

³³ FOMBRUN, Charles J. and VAN RIEL, Cees B.M., *Fame and fortune: how successful companies build winning reputation*, Pearson Financial Times, London, 2004, p. 64.

³⁴ Cfr. DANDO, Nicole and SWIFT, Tracey, "Transparency and assurance: Minding the credibility gap", *Journal of Business Ethics*, vol. 44, n° 2-3, 2003, pp. 195-200; FLEISCHMANN, K.R. and WALLACE, W.A., "A covenant with transparency: Opening the black box of models", *Communications of the ACM*, vol. 48, n°.5, 2005, pp. 93-97; DE LA CIERVA, Yago, "La comunicación en tiempos de crisis", in MORA, J.M. (ed.), *10 ensayos de comunicación institucional*, EUNSA, Pamplona, 2009, p.163; CHRISTENSEN, Lars, *op. cit.*, p. 163.

and the marketing discipline³⁵, we use a marketing approach at this point to introduce the principles of IC: considering this, at present, consumers, users and other types of clients of different organizations tend to meet intangible values when they purchase a product or a service, a natural step for an organization, from a marketing approach, would be to study its public's inner values and try to relate these values to its brand. However, an institutional communication approach contemplates some other aspects by means of advocating the authenticity of an institution identity. Let us assume there is an entrepreneur who identifies a market segment formed by people who are so sensitive to price that do not care much about food quality. This entrepreneur can make the decision to start a business offering low quality food (under local law limits) in terms of levels of fat, salt, sugar and other potentially harmful ingredients for health. From a marketing point of view, this would be a market opportunity so the advice would be to go ahead with the project. However, from an IC perspective, the entrepreneur should reflect on how honest and how transparent his/her business could be. Also to what extent he/she feels identified with the essence of the business purpose. Not a few of examples of real organizations show a lack of pure IC principles. From scandalous cases such as Arthur Andersen or Poly Implants Prothèses to less shocking cases like the well-known regular abusive practices of telecommunication companies constantly reported by consumers associations, are some evidence of organizations which do not embrace the principles of institutional communication. In Argenti's³⁶ words "corporate communication is an attitude or set of beliefs that people have about what and how to communicate and the inherent value of such efforts to communicate". We can conclude then that IC instruments must contemplate transparency principle and remain loyal to institutional identity. Institutional messages are meant to tell the different stakeholders what the institution is and does. Furthermore, the development of new technologies prompt institutions to respect these principles in their IC actions since stakeholders' response to an improper message can be immediate and notorious, rapidly affecting institutional image.

4. *The lipdub as an innovative IC tool*

IC is becoming more and more dynamic involving many shifting channels and new capabilities³⁷. Organizations tend to be updated on new trends and have a proactive attitude towards innovation. In this sense, information and communication technologies (ICT) provide institutions with many opportunities and at the same time they introduce an increasing complexity³⁸. ICT help institutions to develop their image through different concepts such as interactivity, transparency, innovation, accessibility, proximity or originality. This new approach of corporate image through new technologies leaves aside the old "tell style" of communication³⁹ and gives rise to the so-called digital corporate image. The digital corporate image entails different elements

³⁵ See PÉREZ-LATRE, Francisco J., *op. cit.*, pp. 215-237.

³⁶ ARGENTI, Paul A., *op. cit.*, p. 358.

³⁷ *Ibíd.*, p. 358.

³⁸ LA PORTE, José María, *op. cit.*, p. 29; cfr. IHATOR, Augustine S., "Communication style in the information age", *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, vol. 6 n° 4, 2001, p.199.

³⁹ Cfr. MUNTER, M., *Guide to managerial communication* (7th ed.), Prentice Hall, Upper Saddle River, 2005.

practically within any organizations' reach: web sites, interactive catalogs, newsletters, corporate blogs, podcasts, presence in social networks, videos publishing in mass participatory video content sites, etc. This brings a power shift on the communication control from organizations to stakeholders. Clients, employees or competitors can influence corporate communication easily from their bedroom's computer.

In this section we deal with a communication tool largely used in the last years that became a social phenomenon by the time. It was a short term communication action which effects on corporate image of different institutions still remain in many cases. We refer to the communication activity known as *lipdub*⁴⁰. This can be defined as a one-shot and amateur video clip recorded by a group of people (usually employees or students) who lip sync to a song, act and dance while the camera follows them through the facilities of the institution they belong to⁴¹. The *lipdub* was used to communicate an institutional message from private and public organizations such as companies, student residences, residences for the elderly, schools, events, universities, etc. It was especially successful at the University context, where students starred these videos and spread them through different Internet tools; but it was soon copied by other types of companies devoted to the consumption market which used it with the aim to reinforce the social impact of their companies in social media. When it succeeded it turned out a profitable decision to film a *lipdub*, it did not cost much and its social impact was huge. However, this apparently "soft communication action" may entail significant implications for institutions.

5. An exploratory study on the *lipdub*

The *lipdub* has been little studied in the literature in spite of the fact that it constitutes an IC tool with relevant impact on stakeholders' imaginary and therefore on institutional image as well. It was internationally presented in media just as a "funny" initiative from institutions' employees or students with no further considerations. However, the *lipdub* is a means that communicates institutional values with a high degree of credibility since it involves staff implication and is provided with a sense of natural spontaneity whether real or not. The widely accepted assertion that "everything communicates" turns out especially important in the case of a *lipdub* because of the credibility it conveys. The positive or negative message communicated via *lipdub* will flow more easily to message recipients than, for example, the message conveyed by any other professional corporate video. For this reason, it is important to be aware of the fact that it requires a planning effort. Far from the appearance that it constitutes a spontaneous action, the decision to carry out a *lipdub* must involve the institution managers. There must be somebody responsible for the positive and eventually negative effects derived from the use of a *lipdub* as an IC instrument⁴². But previously to the analysis of implications, in order to

⁴⁰ The term *lipdub* was coined by Jakob Lodwick one of the founders of the video-sharing website Vimeo, in 2006, in a video entitled *Lip Dubbing: Endless Dream*.

⁴¹ The first *lipdub* came from a group of students from the University of Furtwangen (Germany) in 2008. However it reached its highest popularity when some students of the University of Quebec (Canada) uploaded their *lipdub* on the Internet as a response to the University of Furtwangen public calling for new *lipdubs*. It went soon around the world having a great impact on international media. <http://universitylipdub.com/videos/>; http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-zcOFN_VBVo

⁴² DÍAZ-MÉNDEZ, Montserrat, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

understand them better, it is necessary to conceptualize the *lipdub* by describing its main features. To this end, the lack of literature addressing specifically the *lipdub* justifies the undertaking of research to define its distinctive characteristics. Our study is presented below.

The purpose.

This study aims at answering the questions: *What is a quality lipdub and how is it featured? and what implications does the making of a lipdub entail for institutions from a communicative perspective?*

The method.

With the purpose stated above of featuring the *lipdub* to explain its implications for institutions, an exploratory study was carried out. The aforementioned lack of literature dealing with the *lipdub* prompted us to address this phenomenon from a grounded approach. Multi-case study logic was applied⁴³. We started this study with no previous data or research to base on so we used video visualization as principal source of evidence.

Cases selection.

According to the grounded approach a general search of *lipdubs* was performed in the Internet through different web search engines and *lipdubs* specialized sites. We first saw 75 videos of an average length of 5.5 minutes each which added up to 6.8 hours approximately. During the preliminary viewing of these 75 videos a report containing information from each was made in order to identify the criteria to use to reduce the sample so as to make the multi-case study logic operational. The criteria sought to meet both theoretical and literal replications⁴⁴ which allowed comparisons among the cases. Thus the similarity and disparity among videos together with the type of institution developing the *lipdub* were the main criteria to determine the cases to study. Finally, a convenience subsample of 25 videos⁴⁵ was selected including elements ranging from high quality to low quality from Universities and other corporations.

Analysis protocol.

After the preliminary visualization of the 75 video-sample, the subsample videos were visualized four times each during two weeks (representing more than 9 hours of video observation). A detailed description of every *lipdub* was accomplished for each case. The cross-analysis of these videos intended to identify the main characteristics determining a quality *lipdub* according to its contribution to institutional image. Then by triangulating the information drawn from this analysis with the theoretical framework developed in this paper we describe the implications of the *lipdub* for institutions.

Qualitative analysis results.

Videos cross-analysis allowed us to track down different aspects to consider when assessing a *lipdub*. According to our analysis, table 1 gathers and classifies the main categories and items determining a quality *lipdub*:

⁴³ Cfr. YIN, Robert K., *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, Applied Social Research Methods, 2009, p. 25.

⁴⁴ *Ibíd.*, p. 54.

⁴⁵ See Appendix.

Table 1: Categories and items determining *lipdub* quality

<i>Category</i>	<i>Subcategory</i>	<i>Items</i>
Technical aspects	Video type	<i>Lipdub</i> , other type of institutional video
	Filming quality	Image steadiness and dynamism
	Execution	Lipping, characters, actors' performance
	Edition quality (image and music assembling)	
	Length	Song length, extras
Content-related aspects	Message	Objectives clarity, suitability, coherence, institution name
	Storyboard	Logic, creativity, suitability
	Overall harmony	Choreographies, costumes, scenes linking

Source: The author.

Lipdub quality was evaluated according to two principal aspects: technical⁴⁶ and content-related aspects.

5.1. *Technical aspects*

Only general technical aspects were considered since the *lipdub* is, by definition, an *amateur* video. However, this fact does not mean the technical category has to be pushed into the background when evaluating a *lipdub* from a communicational viewpoint. Although not professional, there are some technical standards that must be met in order to please the *lipdub* viewer and therefore, fulfil the institution's objectives. After our analysis, the following technical aspects are presented as key elements to be observed in a high quality *lipdub*:

a) Video type: a *lipdub* is a one-shot video. Some *lipdubs* in the sample filmed the video in more than one shot, probably with the aim of improving quality but this decision spoils the concept.

b) Filming quality: in spite of the fact that the *lipdub* is not a conventional professional video it must be done professionally. Adequate technical means that provide image steadiness are minimum standards. In this regard, image dynamism constitutes another technical requirement. The shot must be dynamic and smooth. Some *lipdubs* in the sample did not meet this requirement as sequences changed too fast causing a dizziness sensation to the viewer.

a) Execution: surprisingly many *lipdubs* failed in its essence, the lipping. Lipping stands out as a key factor to assess *lipdub* quality. As for execution, characters selection and actors' performance will influence *lipdub* quality to a great extent. Actors may be employees or students, in both cases they represent the people of the institution; their

⁴⁶ See more on subjective video quality assessment in, e.g.: PAULIKS, R. and SLAIDINS, I., "Impact of Video Content and Technical Specifications on Subjective Quality Assessment", *Electronics and Electrical Engineering*, vol. 6 n°. 122, 2012, pp. 91-96; SESHADRINATHAN, Kalpana, SOUNDARARAJAN, Rajiv, BOVIK, Alan C. and CORMACK, Lawrence K., Study of Subjective and Objective Quality Assessment of Video, *IEEE Transactions On Image Processing*, 2009.

attitude in the video must represent institution's values. In this sense, it is important to bear in mind that the spontaneity linked to it may mislead the understanding of the *lipdub* purposes by its "actors". This is why the execution should be monitored in some way during the video shooting.

b) Edition quality: this deals with the image and music assembling quality. This is a fundamental aspect, bad assembling would make the video uncomfortable to watch. Most *lipdubs* in the sample did well in this point probably because the fact of having just one shot makes this task easier.

c) Length: it is determined by the length of the song chosen plus extras such as credits, funny making-of takes, acknowledgements, sketches, etc. The average length of the sample was 5 minutes and 36 seconds. Universities' *lipdubs* tend to be longer than companies'.

5.2. Content-related aspects

The *lipdub* content deals basically with the message the institution aims to convey through this instrument and how to get it across. Most *lipdubs* in the sample get to transmit a clear message and others fail to do so by neglecting some important aspects such as message clarity, the storyboard and the global harmony perception.

a) Message: it is paramount that institutions goals are clear at the very beginning of the project. A *lipdub* is an IC tool; as such its planning must contemplate the strategic approach featuring IC. The institution should ask itself what values it wants to portray: team work, scientific research, innovation, social commitment, etc. To guarantee the *lipdub* fulfils institutional goals the answer to this question must be suitable and coherence with the institution performance in the society; that is, authenticity constitutes a core value in any IC action planning and so for *lipdubs*. It is likewise important that the name of the institution is showed at some point of the video so as to remind the viewer who they have to associate the values conveyed by the video with.

b) Storyboard: the second step is to decide *who* will represent those values, *where* (what facilities to show) and *how* (creativity and logic of sequences). A storyboard is needed in order to draw an engaging route through facilities. It must contemplate a layout of both scenes and ideas. Each scene planned in the storyboard must be related to a specific goal regardless its informal and funny purposes. It is a matter of communicating through entertainment and not entertaining through communication. Institutional image is such an important asset that cannot be damaged because of an improvised action.

c) Overall harmony: when a *lipdub* looks chaotic the viewer loses interest soon. Institutions have to strive to manage those elements influencing the viewer's perception. In this sense, some elements help to harmonize the shot of the *lipdub*: smooth scenes transitions, the inclusion of choreographies, the use of uniform-coloured costumes, avoiding close-up shots of people not lippping the song, etc.

The entertaining component intrinsic to a *lipdub* may lead their makers to misunderstand the value of this instrument thus leaving aside the strategic value of the message conveyed through it. Content aspects are likewise important as technical performance. We must bear in mind viewers (different constituencies) receive this type of video as a unit. They get a global picture of the video which automatically put down

on the institution backing it up. Here is where *lipdub* implications for institutions must be observed in order to protect institutional image.

6. *Lipdub implications for institutions*

The triangulation of the previous analysis with extant literature and theory on IC taking a deductive approach allow us to explain implications of the *lipdubs* for institution. We, thus, aim at highlighting the relevance of this IC tool used and considered by many academicians and practitioners as of a soft nature.

6.1. *Lipdub positive implications*

Lipdub provides the organization with some benefits which can be divided into two categories: internal and external benefits.

a) *Internal benefits*

Internal benefits of the *lipdub* are related especially to institutions' members/employees. Thus, (1) the *lipdub* can be used as a motivating activity for the organization's employees. It can be used as a managerial tool to facilitate institutional socialization⁴⁷. The recording of a *lipdub* is usually a motivating and funny activity. For this reason, the decision to perform a *lipdub* can respond to a human resources policy activity aiming at promoting a good working atmosphere by socializing members of institution to institutional life. In this sense it has been deemed a collaborative video⁴⁸. In the university context, it acts as a means to reinforce the sense of belonging of students fostering the attitude to collaborate with the institution to achieve its goals while they are students and afterwards. At the same time it can be used as a potential students attraction tool since it is very appealing for youngsters to belong to an institution that puts itself across with such a friendly image. Also (2) it represents an opportunity for the institution managers to remind their employees the institutional philosophy. It is not easy for managers to transmit regularly to their employees the values that make up the institution philosophy. With less "face time", institutions find more difficulties in communicating institutional values and culture⁴⁹. In this sense, the moment when employees are given instructions to perform the *lipdub* becomes a chance for the institution to consolidate its philosophy among employees. That is, the *lipdub* should adjust to real institutional philosophy: "Lies are not profitable and end up damaging even the most solid image"⁵⁰.

⁴⁷ THRALLS, C., "Rites and ceremonials. Corporate video and the construction of social realities in modern organizations", *Journal of Business and Technical Communication*, vol. 6, n° 4, 1992, p. 381.

⁴⁸ Cfr. SUBIRES MANCERA, M. Purificación, "El fenómeno del lipdub como experiencia audiovisual colaborativa en la era de la web social", *Revista Comunicación*, vol.1, n° 10, 2012, p. 1619.

⁴⁹ ARGENTI, Paul A., *op. cit.*, p. 361.

⁵⁰ ÁLVAREZ, Tomás and CABALLERO, Mercedes, *Vendedores de imagen. Los retos de los nuevos gabinetes de comunicación*, Madrid: Paidós, Papeles de Comunicación, 18, Madrid, 1997, p. 119.

b) *External benefits*

External positive effects derived from the use of *lipdub* are related to image creation and its distribution channel. (3) The *lipdub* puts across a socially responsible facet of the organization by involving directly the organization employees in a friendly project. Current social demands to institutions are usually focused on environmental and social issues and labour work conditions⁵¹. In the *lipdub* video employees look satisfied and happy to work for their institution. Thus, since society is more and more concerned about labour conditions of employees/members, organizations that are friendly with their employees enjoy great popularity. In this sense, as the participation in a *lipdub* constitutes a free employee's decision the different stakeholders understand that the institution employees carrying out the *lipdub* do really enjoy belonging to that organization. Therefore, the *lipdub* represents a reliable instrument for an institution in order to transmit an image of institution that cares about their employees. A different nature benefit provided by the use of a *lipdub* stems from the fact that (4) it showcases the institution facilities. Physical evidence influences stakeholders' perception of an institution image⁵². It is widely accepted that tangible environment constitutes a source of value creation since it helps clients and users to trust an organization⁵³. Then, the visualization of tangible elements of an organization through a *lipdub* will contribute to a large extent to image creation whether positively or not. Tangible elements that can be shown in a *lipdub* are: technological equipments, neat-looking employees, light, colour, textures, furniture material and style, wall decoration, etc. Another positive effect, as long as the *lipdub* is successful comes from its distribution channel, (5) it can be quickly spread on the Internet through e-mail, blogs, social networks, and other Internet choices at a minimum cost. The fast dissemination of the *lipdub* will be to the benefit of institutional image. Finally, (6) the *lipdub* can act as a channel to advertise other institutions' brands or products. For example, some master courses are advertised on Universities *lipdubs*.

Briefly, we can state that eventual results derived from these benefits could be the attraction of new clients, potential employees may feel encouraged to apply for a job in that institution, general public may generate positive word of mouth, the media may talk about the institution in an independent way, etc. However, on the other hand, a misconception of what a *lipdub* is can cause some negative effects for an institution as well.

6.2. *Lipdub negative implications*

The decision of an institution to undertake this apparently simple and informal project must be carefully studied by top managers. Undoubtedly, institutional communication

⁵¹ ALONSO BENITO, L.E., *La era del consumo*, Siglo XXI, Madrid, 2005. DÍAZ-MÉNDEZ, Montserrat, "Ethics and consumption: a difficult balance", *International Review on Public and Nonprofit Marketing*, vol. 7, n° 1, 2010, p. 3.

⁵² V.g. BITNER, Mary Joe, "The Impact of Physical Surroundings on Customers and Employees", *Journal of Marketing*, vol. 56, April, 1992, pp. 57-71; UPAH, Gregory D., "Impression Management in Service Marketing: Key Research Issues", in Berry, L.L., SHOSTACK G.L. and UPAH, G.D. (eds.), *Emerging Perspectives on Services Marketing*, American Marketing Association, Chicago, 1983, pp. 105-107.

⁵³ LEVITT, Theodore, "Marketing Intangible Products and Product Intangibles", *Harvard Business Review*, vol. 59, 1981, p. 96.

includes information posted on an institution's Web sites and blogs⁵⁴ and on any other Internet platform as long as it is issued by the institution. But the overall image an individual has about an institution is a result of all the messages related to it gathered through different sources whether controlled by the institution or not. In this sense, Internet represents a space where institutions can transmit their messages and obtain an immediate response from publics. The fact that technology accommodates real-time dialogue between institutions and their publics brings them to react to public inquires with less time to prepare their own reply⁵⁵. Therefore they must strive to deliver high quality messages in order to prevent the institution from negative publics' response which will be quickly spread all over the Internet. After the recent experience of *lipdubs* it can be concluded that it is not difficult to fail when releasing this type of videos. Low quality standards of a *lipdub* –derived whether from technical or content-related aspects– can damage dramatically the image of an institution. So, although this video is especially featured by its informal nature, informality must meet certain standards. The following factors may end up in a serious damage to institutional image:

a) Lack of top managers' supervision

This threat is of the utmost importance. Since the *lipdub* is a communication tool it must be supervised by the people responsible for the institution communication. A *lipdub* shows the name of the institution and, therefore, it has to be carefully assessed before it is launched. Specifically, top managers should watch the following aspects as for the *lipdub* initiative: study of the convenience to carry out a *lipdub*; communication objectives setting; composition of the work team in charge of the development of the project; supervision of the video main idea, storyboard, song chosen and the execution process; and technical provision.

There was in practice a particular type of institution where the lack of top manager supervision damaged institutional image: Universities. The little knowledge of Universities managers on *lipdubs* led students to take this activity only as an opportunity for having fun. They uploaded in the Internet very low quality videos. Managers noticed their mistake once the *lipdub* was already published.

b) Inadequate resources

Inappropriate technical means together with the involvement of unqualified people in charge of directing, filming, editing or distributing the *lipdub* will end up in a bad quality result which will cloud the institution image. This entails a risk for the achievement of institution goals.

c) Misconception of the *lipdub*.

The *lipdub* is not a conventional promotional video recorded with high performance equipments. Institutions who perform these types of videos under the *lipdub* denomination fail since they will hardly catch the attention of publics. It is a mistake to think a *lipdub* is a bad quality video, it is just a different concept. It requires a good storyboard and a director. The storyboard will define the sequence of scenes, the route, choreographies, timings, and also specific people for determined scenes. The less chaotic the *lipdub* is the greater acceptance it will enjoy. Regarding its message, it

⁵⁴ ARGENTI, Paul A. *op cit.*, p 358.

⁵⁵ *Ibíd.*, p. 359.

should avoid dealing with controversial matters such as political and religious messages and aesthetic sense and good taste must rule the execution⁵⁶.

d) Dishonest message.

The *lipdub* became popular because it showed a natural and fresh view of institutions since its own employees (or students) were involved in transmitting the institutional message. One can hardly accuse an institution of being dishonest by watching its *lipdub*. The fact that employees have to be involved in it hinders the pursuit of unethical purposes. However, if the institution finally gets to undertake a *lipdub* with the aim of cleaning up its image due to a bad performance it should be aware that publics' response in the Internet will come along quickly. Honesty and authenticity principles must prevail.

e) Roles performance.

If the *lipdub* actors do not play their roles properly they can transmit a negative image about institution's employees' talent, qualification and competence. They are not supposed to be professional actors but should be concerned that they represent a brand, a name or a reputation. The message recipients have to enjoy the viewing of the *lipdub*, and here the way people play their roles is very important, otherwise the institution would fail. Viewers are demanding and expect entertainment from a *lipdub*. Institutional message comes through entertainment in the *lipdub*. For this reason, it is advisable that the *lipdub* director has some psychology knowledge and the ability to anticipate the reaction of the viewers.

The aforementioned threats for an institution aiming to undertake a *lipdub* can be summarized in the lack of supervision of top managers. The involvement of top managers in every IC decision guarantees a coherent communication strategy according to institutional global goals. A punctual wrong decision can spoil the efforts and work invested in IC during a long period of time⁵⁷.

7. Conclusions

This paper has dealt with the concept of institutional communication and the relevance of every IC action undertaken by an institution regardless its magnitude in order to achieve a twofold goal: members' socialization and image improvement. In so doing, first, we looked into what IC encompasses and image and identity were tackled as core fundamentals of the development of IC according to seminal literature. From this analysis, IC principles were highlighted, thus, transparency and loyalty to institution identity resulted paramount when pursuing a successful long-lasting image. Related to this, new technologies were presented as a solid reason to prompt institutions to respect these principles in their IC actions since stakeholders' response to an improper message can be immediate and notorious, rapidly affecting institutional image. New technologies have contributed to the development of IC providing institutions with several instruments which allow them to communicate and interact with their stakeholders in

⁵⁶ Originally the *lipdub* arose as a friendly communication tool then its use as a protest tool would go against its nature.

⁵⁷ See the case of photoshoped pictures posted by BP on their crisis response website when the Gulf of Mexico oil spill occurred.

real time. The generalized profusion of these tools usually leads institutions to undertake them without a previous strategic assessment, basically because they understand these actions are soft and harmless for the institution. On the contrary, we understand that every IC action regardless its magnitude must be carefully studied before carrying it out. IC efforts must be directed to prevent institutional image to be damaged since negative effects on institutional image are very difficult to erase from stakeholders' minds. In order to support this, the particular type of IC video, the *lipdub*, was analysed.

Due to the lack of specific literature on the lipdub as an IC instrument, we carried out an exploratory study as an attempt to approximate to the concept and be able to provide an accurate definition of it by describing its distinctive characteristics. Thus a convenience sample of 25 *lipdubs* was analyzed applying the multi-case study logic. From our analysis we suggest a *lipdub* is an IC tool consisting of an *amateur*-like video clip, filmed in one sole shot, where people belonging to an institution actively participate in the communication of the institution's values by performing like actors lipping a song according to a planned storyboard. In order to achieve IC goals it must meet some technical and content-related quality standards. In this sense, some technical items have been highlighted such as image steadiness and dynamism, characters selection, people's performance, lipping quality, song length and quality of edition. As for content-related aspects several items stood out: institution's goals clarity, message coherence, suitability of undertaking this action, the use of some global harmony techniques, and an appropriate and creative storyboard determining *who* will play in the video, what facilities will be showed (*where*) and *how* the message will be communicated (creativity and logic of sequences).

After featuring the *lipdub*, by linking theory with the information gathered from our study some implications for institutions were highlighted. Thus, on one side, we can state a good *lipdub* contributes to image creation and the socialization of institution's members by showing a friendly facet of the organization, showcasing the organization facilities and acting as a motivating activity for the institution staff. It also constitutes a valuable instrument for managers since the performing of a *lipdub* is a good opportunity to remind employees –or students– the institution philosophy. Long term *lipdub* effects will be to the benefit of institutional image. On the other side, if the *lipdub* is not properly approached the institutional image can result seriously damaged. A bad quality *lipdub* far from being a simple failure involves a serious damage to institutional image which restitution is complex. Videos uploaded in the Internet hardly ever can be completely withdrawn. Thus, we suggest avoiding some negative factors. The most important one deals with the supervision of top managers. In this sense, as IC is of a strategic nature, all IC actions –no matter their supposed magnitude– should be authorized and monitored to some extent by top managers in order to assured that institutional values are respected and observed.

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Appendix

The following list depicts the 25 *lipdubs* analyzed in this paper:

1. Bologna University (Italy)
2. LaTrobe University, (Australia)
3. Lisbon University, (Portugal)
4. Polytech'Marseille (France)
5. SungKongHoe University, (Korea)
6. Univeristy of Extremadura (Spain)
7. University Centre of Villanueva (Spain)
8. University of Boston (USA)
9. University of Furtwangen (Germany)
10. University of Groningen, (The Netherlands)
11. University of La Sabana (Colombia)
12. University of Navarra, School of Communication (Spain)
13. University of Québec in Montréal (Canada)
14. Uppsala University (Sweden)
15. Adidas
16. Alinéa (France)
17. Carrefour Market Bordeaux Saint Jean (France)
18. Carrefour Market Saint Priest, (France)
19. Dizengoff Center Tel Aviv (Israel)
20. FNAC Bilbao (Spain)
21. GAES (Spain)
22. Ikea (Spain)
23. ROCA (Portugal)
24. Shiseido (France)
25. Vueling Airlines (Spain)